A CURRICULUM ON MENTAL SKILLS AND CONCEPTS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE

by

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To my family, who always reminds me to love deeply, work hard, and keep a sense of humor. To Kevork Mardirossian and Lee Phillips, who became my family away from home. And to Dr. Jeffrey Huber for all his guidance and support.

A Curriculum on Mental Skills and Concepts for Effective Practice and Performance

The following project is a college-level curriculum on mental training for musicians. Based on the understanding, discussion, study, and practice of several mental skills, the class is intended to provide psychological strategies and specific exercises for improving practice, performance, and overall student well-being.

Mental skills do not replace physical practice but are crucial, nevertheless, for consistently managing the demands of the music field. In addition to receiving mental-skills training, students should revise those skills daily until their application becomes automatic.

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Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

This project results from an extensive process of distilling and refining ideas, from very general concepts to concrete and specific skills, terms, and exercises. It has been shaped over a period of four years, since the beginning of my doctoral candidacy in 2015, when I became interested in aspects of performance that go beyond physical and musical skill.

During the first semester of my doctoral program, I enrolled in Associate Musicology Professor Phil Ford's "Practice" class at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. The class was a seminar geared towards understanding the nature of the process of practice and the similarities between many different practices, such as practicing a musical instrument, cooking, or painting. I very much appreciated the opportunity to participate in student discussions about topics that concerned us but were rarely addressed in other classes. I also realized how we sometimes felt uncomfortable discussing personal ideas about practice while there was a sense of relief and comfort when we realized that some of our struggles were similar to what other students in the class were experiencing. I thought, then, that we should not feel uncomfortable talking about these things and wondered why sometimes the mental aspect of music felt like such a taboo topic. I started thinking about the idea of stage presence and mental *strength*—what those terms meant and if they were innate or if they could be explained and taught. I was also interested in how to improve the process of practice for myself and for my students. If practice is critically important in music and it is how we develop our skills, then how could I help myself to practice more efficiently, making the best use of that time? These questions led me to read about the Alexander Technique and how concentration relates to the mastery of music. I was still not sure exactly, though, of what I was ultimately looking for.

Two years later, following the advice of a friend, I audited a psychology class led by Jeffrey Huber (now one of my dissertation advisors) in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Indiana University. The class included a video call with Noa Kageyama, a former violinist and performance psychologist at The Julliard School of Music, who is dedicated to helping people perform under pressure.

During the call, he discussed how certain exercises could help improve practice and prepare for performances. I then realized that this was what I had been looking for. The problems I was concerned about were easily defined and practically addressed; they were no longer abstract.

Hence, I started narrowing down my ideas by researching psychology, sport psychology, and applied sport psychology through books, articles, and videos. I found that the field of sport psychology addresses the mental side of performance in a much more thorough manner than literature in the music field does. For example, various problematic aspects are addressed in sport psychology, including the natural problems that arise from performance and competition, and authors frequently cite specific skills and exercises for athletes and coaches. When processing this information, I tried to break down concepts, looking always for the practical side of things. I also considered the similarities and differences between the world of sport and that of music to have a clearer idea of how I might apply these concepts in the most accurate manner and what concepts might differ across the two domains.

Inspired by the aforementioned coursework, I decided to create a curriculum on mental skills as my final doctoral project. This format would give me the necessary freedom and breadth to deeply research a topic I was extremely interested in while also providing a practical design useful for both a university course and as a tool for private teaching.

My final project, therefore, is a 10-unit curriculum for teaching five mental skills—*imagery, energy management, cognitive restructuring, self-talk*, and *goal setting*—as well as five concepts for effective practice and performance—*growth mindset, mental quiet, preparation, confidence*, and *consistency*. The curriculum's goals are threefold:

- Prepare teachers to help students understand the skills and concepts and how to apply them to both music-learning and performing environments.
- Offer exercises and activities for putting these skills and concepts into action.
- Provide a forum for writing about and discussing these skills and concepts and how they personally apply to each student.

In an ideal world, every student would grow up learning about these skills and concepts and how to apply them in practice and performance. But in reality, every student is a unique case, presenting very different learning processes, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. While one student might need more work on self-talk, another might benefit more from learning better concentration techniques. When giving private lessons, a teacher might have a better knowledge of the student, making it easier to identify weaknesses and offer help strategically—at the best time and using an appropriate method; when teaching in a group setting, the opportunities are different, with a different set of advantages and disadvantages.

For this reason, when this curriculum is used to complement instrumental private lessons, the skills and concepts are to be digested and understood by a teacher and slowly introduced to the student. Once introduced, however, they should not be forgotten but, rather, reviewed regularly. It takes time and consistent review, for example, to master the use of mental imagery and avoid negative thoughts during performance. The teacher's role, in collaboration with the student, is to decide which skill to focus on and to not overwhelm the student with too many new skills at one time. These skills and concepts should be a part of daily practice until they become virtually automatic.

When this curriculum is used in a group setting, however, it is intended to work more as a tool than as a remedy. Students are to be offered information and space for reflecting on and discussing different issues, but the teacher should not claim to cure any maladies or sell magic tricks. *Mental skills* are just like physical skills; they have to be practiced consistently to be learned. Teachers should frequently stress that all skills require continuous work, but it is up to students to identify the areas in which they feel they need more help. The primary goal should be to make students aware of the concepts without becoming too fixated on the results—skills take time to master, and the road toward mastery includes failing more than once. That is why focusing on results from the beginning can easily backfire; it is better to direct the student's attention to information and the learning process. This should also not be done in a theoretical way but rather, in a personal, fun, and engaging way, so students become interested, relate to the problems, and are *willing to participate* in a discussion with their peers. Note that students with anxiety or

depression should seek professional help because addressing those issues is beyond the scope of this curriculum.

Regardless of the setting in which the curriculum may be used, teachers should help students understand that there is no shame in talking about the mental side of practice and performance. Moreover, students *should* be encouraged to be open-minded; it *should* be normal to talk about these issues and problems, and to brainstorm possible solutions. The less we fear *fear*, the less real it becomes, and there should be absolutely no romanticism or mysticism around it. Just as there is no mysticism whatsoever in performance, however much we like to think so at times, performance is all about skills: physical, creative, *and* mental. The result, of course, can and should be magical—but the process to get there is far from it.

When I first started reading about these skills, concepts, and exercises and applying them to myself, I became overwhelmed at times. I often thought, "I already have enough on my plate; I truly can't take on anything else to practice." At the beginning, it felt like too much to handle. But when I clearly saw and understood the impact the proper application of these skills, concepts, tools, and exercises had on my well being, practice, and performances, I made the decision to change my attitude and slowly accepted that this was something I had to work on consistently.

For me, I know, this is the beginning of a long journey, and I look forward to more reading, brainstorming, and experimenting with creative ways of applying all of these different skills and concepts in my personal violin practice, performances, and teaching.

Let the learning begin.

Chapter Two: The CURRICULUM

Grading Policies

The final grade for this course is derived from three elements: class participation (20 percent), 10 short papers, one per unit (50 percent), and a final project (30 percent).

The short papers must be 800 to 1,500 words in length and answer one of the essay questions offered in each unit. Short papers should demonstrate reflection and considerable thought. Instructors may require a student to repeat or rework the exercise if they feel a more thorough response is needed.

The final paper must be 3,200 to 3,500 words in length. To produce the final paper, the student must select a short exercise out of any of the units of the curriculum to work on a specific skill. The student will practice the skill daily for three weeks, writing a short reflection after each practice in a practice diary. Then, the student will write a final paper reflecting on the exercise and on the process itself, and the practice diary must be submitted with the paper.

Some questions to consider when writing the final reflection include:

- Identify ways in which you learned to master the skill you were working on.
- List some ways in which writing your practice diary was helpful in terms of gaining insight into the process and your own development.
- List ways in which the process was different from day to day.
- Did you experience frustration or boredom during the three weeks? If so, list ways in which you dealt with those feelings.

All papers should be submitted in 11-point, times new roman font and be double-spaced.

Unit 1 (Week 1): Growth Mindset

Figure 1: Picasso, Pablo. *Two Girls Reading*, 1932.

Topic Overview

A *mindset* is a self-perception, a self-theory that people hold about themselves. Psychologist Carol S. Dweck, a leading researcher in the field of motivation, distinguishes between fixed and growth mindsets and explains how people's beliefs strongly affect what they want and whether they succeed in getting it. In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, she defines the "fixed" mindset as based on the belief that one's basic qualities are carved in stone. The "growth" mindset, on the other hand, is based on

the belief that basic qualities are things that can be cultivated through effort, which suggests that everyone can change through application and experience.[1]

In her research, Dweck demonstrates that young people develop different "self-theories," which are sets of beliefs about themselves and about their abilities, and that these theories affect their learning processes in different ways. Dweck explains how having one mindset or the other affects our *motivation*, the force that impels us to achieve a goal,[2] our views on *effort* or hard work, challenge, and how we react to failure. With a fixed mindset, setbacks are a signal to seek remedies to protect self-esteem, and failure suggests one's ability is inadequate. In contrast, setbacks are a natural part of learning in the growth mindset, and failure suggests that the appropriate effort or strategy was not employed and that further skills need to be developed through different strategies.

Having a growth mindset means acknowledging that everything in life, everything we are, and everything we do is a combination of many different skills—and skills can be developed in time with the right commands, patience, understanding, and effort. Learning how to play an instrument and learning musical repertoire is, in fact, about putting together many different skills, both technical and creative, to achieve mastery and artistry. The process can be long and challenging. For it to be successful, students need a teacher who can explain and develop all those specific skills and also foster a belief in students that those skills can and eventually will be developed with sufficient time and effort. Cultivating a growth mindset, both in students and in teachers, is vital for the process of effective learning.

Achieving musical expertise is accomplished through deliberate practice.[3] However, teachers first have to establish a frame of mind within students that makes them able to receive and accept information in a healthy manner. When students believe they can develop themselves, they will be open to accurate information about their current abilities, even if that information is unflattering, and they will not mobilize their resources to protect ego by not trying. They also will have the right mindset to deal with

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[1] Dweck, *Mindset*, 6.
[2] Tod, *Sport Psychology*, 185.
[3] O'Neill, "Growth Mindset," 33.

the inevitable setbacks, rejections, and progress interruptions that arise during their student years and professional careers.

The goal of this unit is for students to understand and differentiate between the two mindsets, learn about attitudes affiliated with each, and develop tools to increase their growth mindset—and therefore enhance effective learning and strengthen resilience.

Objectives

After completing Unit 1, students will be able to:

1. Define and differentiate between fixed and growth mindsets.
2. Adopt words and behaviors related to a growth mindset.
3. Increase greater sensitivity to others who have a fixed mindset.
4. Become aware of how changing beliefs about oneself can impact behavior and attitudes, not only in learning but also in other areas of life (*e.g.*, relationships, holistic worldview, etc.).
5. Understand how others' mindsets affect their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

Key Concepts

Mindset

Growth mindset

Fixed mindset

Self-theories

Motivation

Effort

Main Points for Lecture

I. What is a growth mindset and what is a fixed mindset?

- Define terms and be able to differentiate between the two.
    - A mindset is a view that you adopt for yourself.

- The growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts.[4]
- Having a fixed mindset means believing that your basic qualities are carved in stone, which creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over.[5]

- Describe and discuss situations in which people are exhibiting the two different mindsets.

II. Attitudes related to each mindset.

- What attitudes are associated with a growth mindset?
  - Love of learning and prioritizing learning over seeking approval
  - Viewing challenges as opportunities
  - Effort
  - Resilience
  - Risk taking
- What attitudes are associated with a fixed mindset?
  - Seeking approval and validation, which constantly leads to proving oneself
  - High sensitivity towards being wrong or making a mistake
  - Doubt
  - Quitting
  - Assigning blame over taking responsibility
  - Avoiding difficult tasks
  - Setting easily attainable goals

III. How does a mindset change our view on failure and effort?

- People with a growth mindset seek and thrive on challenges.

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[4] Dweck, *Mindset*, 7.
[5] Ibid, 6.

- The growth mindset allows people to love what they are doing and continue loving it in the face of difficulty.
- Failure is perceived as part of the learning process.
- Mindsets are an important part of our personality, but we can change them.

IV. What are specific actions for developing a growth mindset?

- Value risk-taking and learning from failure.
- Create a safe and accepting environment.
- Value effort, persistence, and strategizing.
- Teach that ability can be changed.

V. Student discussion.

- What parts of the concept of growth mindset do you understand conceptually but find hard to apply in real life?
- How can we develop strategies around it?
- How does one strive for excellence but avoid unhealthy perfectionism in the classical music world?
- How do mindsets show up in our everyday lives? Start noticing them.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. What mindset do you have?[6] Through different questions about intelligence and personality, students are required to think about their own mindset.

2. Grow your mindset.[7] Challenging questions about overcoming fear, perfectionism, or something in our past that we think measured us.

[6] See RLCM, "Carol Dweck's Growth v Fixed Mindset Quiz," http://rlcm.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Carol-Dweck-Growth-v-Fixed-Mindset-Quiz.pdf.
[7] Dweck, *Mindset*, 53–54.

3. Praise and labels.[8] A series of questions and exercises that remind us how effort is far more important than talent, and the negative danger of labels.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. Describe a situation in your life in which you think you exhibited a fixed mindset. Write about how the situation could have been different had you a growth mindset instead. Can you extract at least one lesson from the story?

2. Describe a situation in your life, be it a friendship, attitude towards a class, etc., in which you think you could have benefited from having a growth mindset. Describe the situation, provide an explanation, and write down at least three ways you would benefit from the change. For extra points, write down one or two strategies that would help you make this change.

Suggested Reading

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success.* New York: Ballantine Books, 2008.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: The Story of Success.* New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2008.

O'Keefe, Paul A. "Mindsets and self-evaluation: How Beliefs About Intelligence Can Create a Preference for Growth Over Defensiveness." In *The Complexity of Greatness: Beyond Talent or Practice*, edited by Scott Barry Kaufman, 119–134. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

O'Neill, Susan A. "Developing a Young Musician's Growth Mindset: the Role of Motivation, Self Theories, and Resiliency." In *Music and the Mind: Essays in Honour of John Sloboda*, edited by Irene Deliege and Jane Davidson, 31–46. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[8] Ibid, 80–81.

Unit 2 (Weeks 2–3): Mental Quiet—Awareness, Concentration, Attention, Flow

Figure 2: Van Gogh, Vincent. *The Starry Night*, 1889.

Topic Overview

The goal of this unit is to present students with four concepts crucial for improving the mind and body, learning, and proper practice and performance: *awareness*, *attention*, *concentration*, and *flow*. These skills—or states of mind—are needed for improved quality of study, practice, and performance. Students should learn to differentiate among the terms and consciously stop to analyze them—because most of the time they are interconnected and hard to recognize separately. Another objective of this unit is to encourage reflection while offering practical tools for improving these skills. It is also helpful for teachers to recognize the differences among the concepts, distinguish which ones students are lacking, and find ways to help students work on them over time. Be mindful that some of these skills are different in practice than they are in performance, and it is important to have strategies to manage them in both situations.

The first class for this unit emphasizes an understanding of *awareness*, which is the perception of a situation or fact. Awareness of the body is extremely important as a performer, but so too is awareness of the mind—awareness of how thoughts come and go, which thoughts are being detrimental to development, and which thoughts are helpful to performances. When taking action after these sensations or thoughts are noticed, awareness should be nonjudgmental; this is a skill that can be learned through *mindfulness meditation*.

Mindfulness meditation is nonjudgmental attention to experiences in the present moment.[9] Its practice consists of observing and noticing the physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions that accompany an experience—noticing them as they arise and pass away.[10] Some of the positive consequences of practicing mindfulness include exposure, self-management, relaxation, and acceptance.

To improve any skill, especially a physical skill, we have to be attuned with our bodies and be relaxed enough, and detached enough, to be willing to work on it. Being able to accept things as they are first, without emotional reactivity, is crucial for both practice and performance: it is a state of mind conducive to faster improvement in practice and quicker recovery from inevitable mistakes or mental slips during performances. Several exercises that address this skill are included in this curriculum, including breathing and guided meditation exercises that range from 5 to 45 minutes long.

The next skill highlighted in this unit is *attention* or *focus*: the ability to narrow a beam of light and point it exactly where we want. Human beings have a fixed attention capacity. Consequently, it is important to direct our attention to the task at hand. For this particular skill, it is necessary to understand two different dimensions of attention[11]—width (narrow and broad) and direction (internal and external)—and three characteristics—strength, controllability, and flexibility.[12] These characteristics form the basis of questions students should ask themselves:

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[9] Hölzel et al., "How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work," 3.
[10] Ibid, 3.
[11] Nideffer, "Attentional and Interpersonal Style," 394–404.
[12] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 59.

- Can I direct my attention exactly where I want and keep it there?
- Am I able to notice when I am losing attention and self-correct?
- Can I maintain focus for a long period of time?

To accomplish these challenges, students will go through different exercises and drills.

After covering attention, the unit moves on to *concentration*—the state of mind in which we are focused on something and which presupposes focus. It is a state of mind free of judgment, such as the one we train with awareness. However, when we effectively concentrate, we do not passively observe; we intensely focus on something. It is important to work on strategies for the improvement of concentration in practice and in performance, especially under pressure, as well as to learn how to maintain it for long periods of time. Moreover, since the mind and the body do not operate independently, it is essential to understand some prerequisites to concentration—such as sleep, diet, exercise, and increased awareness of one's energy cycles (since our ability to concentrate usually corresponds with times of increased energy).

The unit concludes with an understanding of *flow*, as coined by Hungarian-American Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, which he describes as a highly focused mental state and a "state of optimal experiencing involving total absorption in a task, and creating a state of consciousness where optimal levels of functioning occur."[13] It is an activity in which people act with total immersion, a state in which action follows upon action.[14] Although not exactly the same concept, *peak experiences*—as described by psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow, who studied motivation—can change the person and their perceptions of the world. During peak experiences, people were able to accept their deeper self instead of being afraid and trying to control it—and they could become lost in the present moment, detached from time and place.

Csikszentmihalyi, in contrast, emphasizes the process and not the goal of experience. A flow experience or autotelic experience, as he explains it, is found midway between being too easy (as it gets

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[13] Huber, *Applying Educational Psychology*, 49.
[14] Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 36.

boring) and too difficult (as it produces anxiety). He concluded that the flow experience has eight components: balance between challenge and skill level, merging of action and cognition, clearly defined goals, clear and unambiguous feedback, total concentration on the skill being performed, a sense of being in control without trying to be in control, becoming one with the activity being performed, and loss of time awareness.[15]

The goal for this session is to make students aware of the concept of flow, how it is the key to a happy life, and some of the factors that facilitate or inhibit flow. Students need to recognize how flow is usually present in their best performances but also how it is a critical part of their everyday practice sessions, routines, and lives.

This unit is one of the most important within the curriculum because these skills are basic to understanding and applying mental skills, which are transferrable to many aspects of students' lives.

Student Learning Objectives

After completing Unit 2, students will be able to:

1. Define, recognize, and label awareness, concentration, attention, and flow.
2. Understand that these are specific skills one can practice, and get better at, every day.
3. Introduce daily exercises to improve these skills in their daily practice and performance routines.
4. Be able to better regulate emotions and achieve greater self-control in practice and performance.
5. Notice an improvement in self-efficacy and confidence, which also allows for flow to happen.

Key Concepts

Awareness

Mindfulness Meditation

Concentration / Focus

Attention

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[15] Huber, *Applying Educational Psychology*, 49.

Flow

Main Points for Lecture

I. Awareness.

- Awareness is the perception of a situation or fact.
- Practicing mindfulness meditation, journaling, engaging in self-reflection, and asking for feedback can train it.
- As an introduction to mindfulness meditation and its benefits, meditation is a relaxed attentive state where the mind is clean, relaxed, and focused:
    - Reduces anxiety
    - Helps the brain reduce distractions
    - Enhances self-compassion

II. Focus and attention.

- Focus is directed attention.
- Attentional capacity is limited and dividing it comes at a cost.
- Dimensions of focus include width and direction.
- Three characteristics of focus include strength, controllability/flexibility, and endurance.
- Exercises to improve focus in practice and performance:
    - Create an attentional script plan, a script for your upcoming performances with the situation, your typical response, your optimal response, and what you want to focus on during the event.
    - Create a performance focus plan—your planned thoughts, feelings, behaviors, focus, and cues for an event.
- Establishing a refocusing routine by anticipating possible distractions and how you will respond to them.

III. Concentration.

- Prerequisites for concentration include sleep, diet, and exercise.

- Discussion: What causes distractions in practice and performance? Can we practice how to refocus after a distraction?

IV. Flow.

- Understanding flow and why it matters: find beauty in the routine and not only through our goals.
- Factors that contribute to flow include motivation, optimal arousal, maintaining focus, preparation, optimal environment, positive mental attitude, will, and grit.
- Factors than inhibit flow include lack of preparation, inability to maintain focus, negative mental attitude, unexpected errors, inappropriate arousal, suboptimal environmental conditions, mismatch between skill level, and challenge difficulty.
- Discussion: Can we think of moments in which we have achieved flow? How do they feel? Does it happen only in performance? Can we think of times we experienced flow in practice?

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Progressive relaxation script.[16] In this relaxation exercise, students progressively tense and release several muscle groups; it is this act of tensing and releasing that slowly teaches students a state of true relaxation.

2. Refocusing strategies.[17] This exercise is a script to prepare for different possible distractions before and during a performance including different people or situations. It will help students not leave to chance the mind game during the most dangerous moments of a performance—when we get most nervous and our minds play tricks on us.

3. Stuff that gets me.[18] This is an exercise to identify where the student's thoughts and attention go under pressure. For that, students are asked to think back on different performances and to remember how they responded to mistakes and pressure, not only mentally but also physically and emotionally. We all

[16] Davis, Eshelmand, and McKay, *Stress Reduction Workbook*, 22–23.
[17] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 70–71.
[18] Kageyama, "Beyond Practicing."

have unhelpful patterns (we are all human, after all), and the sooner we identify them, the earlier we can fix or reroute them.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. For a week, every day, try the following 20-minute body scan exercise[19] and write half a page of comments after doing the exercise. How did you feel? Did you get through the whole exercise? The last day of the week, write your observations on how the exercise felt different throughout the week. What other observations do you have about the experience?
2. Plan a performance and fill out the "Performance Focus Planning" exercise beforehand. Write a one-page paper describing your experience. Did you notice a difference in this performance in compared to prior performances in which you did not plan what you were going to focus on? If so, how? If not, why? Explain. What are some benefits of planning ahead how you are going to think in performance?

Suggested Reading

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

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Wood, Ernest. *Concentration: An Approach to Meditation*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1967.

Unit 3 (Weeks 4–5): Preparation

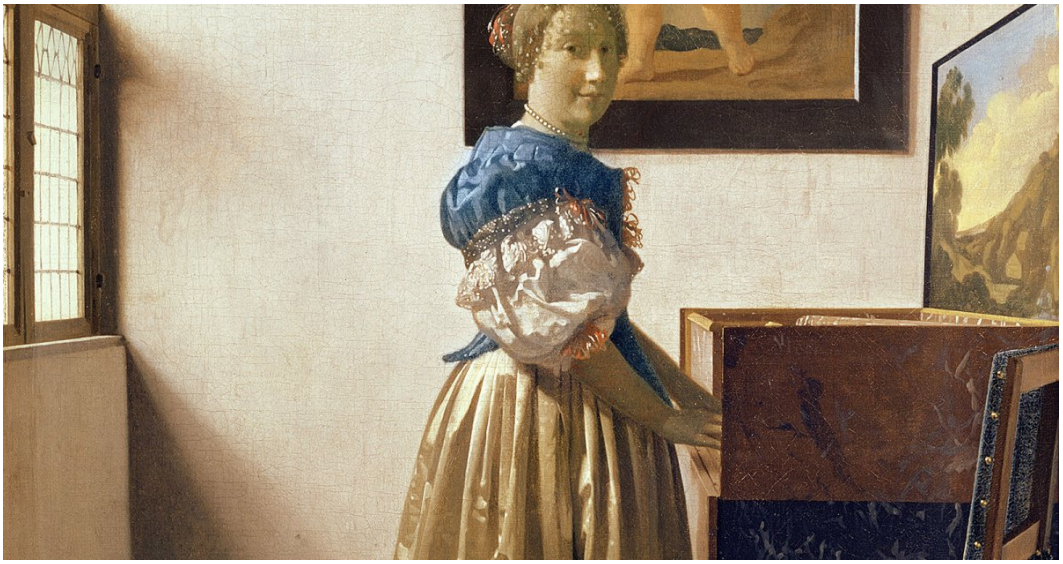

Figure 3: Vermeer, Johannes. *Lady Standing at a Virginal*, 1670.

Topic Overview

Practice is the key to improving performance skills. For musicians, practice is a crucial aspect of daily life, which is why it is important to learn how to do it efficiently, healthily, and productively. An important distinction to make is the difference between mindless and deliberate practice. While *deliberate practice* is *effective practice* derived from the utmost concentration of the brain, *mindless practice* is practicing on autopilot, with no outcome goals or self-monitoring toward improvement. Although it is possible to improve slightly through mindless practice (due to repetition), it is not as reliable and productive as deliberate practice, which is a goal-oriented, organized, systematic, analytic, and strategic effort to raise one's level.[20] Because of the mental, physical, and emotional demands of deliberate practice, students can manage it for only a limited number of hours per day. The number of hours may vary among students based on certain factors such as age, level of expertise, or ability to sustain focus.

The teacher's primary job is to help students learn *how properly to practice* different skills and repertoires. However, this is a class geared towards students who already have a certain amount of control over their practice process. Therefore, the goal is to make them even more aware of the quality of their practice sessions and help them develop practice habits, skills, and strategies. A conversation on the topic is encouraged, as it is very important that students communicate with each other—openly and honestly—about these topics so they learn from each other and not just from the teacher.

The next goal of this unit is for students to be able to distinguish between regular practice and practice for performance, as well as reviewing different strategies they can implement in their practice sessions to recreate the heightened emotional and physiological reactions musicians experience in pressure situations.[21] For example, we can get better at handling pressure situations by playing for other people, recording ourselves, having a reward for meeting a specific standard, or penalizing ourselves for failing to meet a standard. We can also use imagery to see and feel ourselves performing well and create

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[20] Smeltz, "Reframing Student Practice," 3.
[21] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 97.

specific personal strategies to deal with on-site challenges that help us manage our reactions to the pressure.[22] Teachers should encourage this kind of practice and help students develop performance routines such as self-talk routines or strategies to refocus when things go wrong in performance.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the presence of negative emotions (such as shame, fear, frustration, or guilt) in our practice sessions and to develop strategies for coping with them (Unit 6—Cognitive Restructuring and Unit 7—Self-Talk address this topic in depth). Music is a competitive field, like the world of sports. As such, there is little value put on failure, even though we all do fail—and failure is a very important part of learning. We should not suppress negative emotions but learn to accept them, tolerate them, and eventually work through them. This is a supremely important skill, and many teachers and students neglect it.

The goal of this unit is to make students aware of the importance of deliberate practice, not only for the development of their craft but also for any other endeavor they pursue in life. By the end of this unit, students should recognize the difference between mindless practice and deliberate practice, start being more proactive with their practice time, and reflect on the process itself, which involves *self-monitoring* (the ability to observe and evaluate), *self-reflection* (the capacity to exercise introspection), and adjustment.

Objectives

After completing Unit 3, students will be able to:

1. Recognize the difference between deliberate practice and mindless practice in themselves and others.
2. Grow a more proactive and pragmatic mindset for practice—a mindset for getting things done.
3. Develop or expand on their own strategies for better practice and time management.
4. Experience an increase in self-confidence by being able to better self-regulate and become more engaged in the practice process.

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[22] Ibid., 69.

5. Increase effectiveness in rehearsals when interacting with other people.

Key Concepts

Deliberate practice

Effective practice

Mindless practice

Self-monitoring

Self-reflection

Main Points for Lecture

I. What is effective practice?

- Effective practice is deliberate practice—self-command and asking questions.
- Thirteen characteristics of deliberate practice:
    - High motivation and desire
    - Preexisting knowledge
    - Explicit goals for everything done in practice
    - Highly relevant (relevant means improving competition performance)
    - High level of effort
    - High level of concentration
    - Finding enjoyment in improvement, learning something new, or gaining mastery
    - Highly structured
    - Carefully monitored
    - Working closely with an authority
    - Immediate information feedback
    - Using different methods and refining to improve
    - Time and energy

- Can we recognize when our practice is deliberate?
- Can we stop ourselves before we waste our time?
- Problems we deal with in our daily practice include energy management, concentration, self-talk.

II. Strategies for better practice.

- Determine effective practice times: students need to know what times of the day are better for them in terms of concentration and energy purposes, and they need to organize their practice accordingly.
- Reverse scheduling: schedule fun things first and the work you need to do around them as a way of motivating yourself to get the work done and limiting the time you spend on it.
- Iterative practice: avoid the perfectionist trap by practicing in an iterative way. The goal is to go through different layers of process and peel one layer at a time. With each passing iteration, you take care of finer details.
- Practice slowly.
- Train to identify and solve specific problems using problem-solving models, such as:
    - Define what's wrong
    - Analyze why it's wrong
    - Look for ways to overcome the problem
    - Implement a solution

III. Peak performance preparation.

- Understanding pressure changes from practice to performance:
    - Learn how to manage external and internal changes that happen in performance.
    - The ABC model: between a situation (A) and a response (C) there is *our* reaction to the situation, our thoughts and images (B). Sport psychology emphasizes that our reaction is the only thing that we can completely control.[23] Are you in control of your responses?

[23] Ibid., 2.

- Practicing to Perform: performance *must be practiced*.
- Accept pressure as part of the competitive/performance experience.
- Obstacles and strategies:[24]
    - Shaky self-confidence or doubts about ability: imagine successful past performances, visualize future performances seeing and feeling yourself as you are capable, create a success log, monitor self-talk.
    - Feeling pressure to perform: focus effort on what you need to do to perform your best, remind yourself of your goals, do what has worked for you in the past, keep perspective.
    - Letting distractions influence preparation: set guidelines, control your reactions, anticipate possible distractions, isolate yourself from situations that take you away from your preparation routine.
    - Increased worry and physical anxiety: perform deep-breathing exercises or other forms of physical relaxation, calm your mind, focus on what you need to do.
- Develop resilience.

IV. Discussion and reflection on how to improve our practice.

- Do we feel that we practice efficiently? Is what we have been doing so far working for us? If not, what would we like to improve about our practice? Do we practice our performances?
- How do we deal with negative emotions in practice and performance? Do we understand that frustration and discouragement are part of the process?
- How do we use rewards?
- What do we feel is our biggest struggle in practice? Is it time? Is it having too much to focus on? Is it pressure?

[24] Ibid., 70.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Memorization strategies.[25] With the help of different memorization techniques, students are encouraged to think about how to better memorize their music: analyze it, organize it, and test recall.

2. Energy log worksheet.[26] This exercise's goal is for students to figure out when they are most productive during the day to learn how to make better use of their time.

3. Practice sprints.[27] With this exercise, which requires establishing a clear goal and setting a timer for 10 minutes to accomplish it, students will learn the value of setting very specific goals and working efficiently in a highly focused state.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. For a week, record yourself practicing for 10 or 15 minutes each day. After recording, listen to yourself practice and write half a page of impressions and comments. Is your practice pragmatic and concise? Do you have clear strategies and goals? Do you hear yourself getting better with each repetition? What are some things you can specifically do to improve your practice for it to be more productive? Write a two-page paper with comments and a reflection of what you have learned doing this exercise.

2. This is a deliberate practice formula:[28] Define a goal, go for it, evaluate the result, identify the problem, identify the cause, identify potential solutions, test potential solutions. Start implementing it in your practice sessions. For a week, use it every day one or two times during your practice. Then write a short reflection on the process. After the week is over, write a paper on your experience practicing this exercise during the week. Was it helpful to think this way? Did it eliminate frustration? Did it increase your confidence? Would you like to start practicing more this way?

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[25] Kageyama, "Beyond Practicing."
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

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Unit 4 (Weeks 6–7): Mental Imagery

Figure 4: Kandinsky, Vasily. *Color Study: Squares with Concentric Circles*, 1913.

Topic Overview

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to using *mental imagery* as a skill to enhance practice and performance. Imagery is a familiar experience to all human beings; we use it daily to a certain extent, whether or not we are able to recognize it. The term as used in this unit simply implies controlling the experience to use it to our advantage. Mental imagery is very much used in the world of sport and, unfortunately, not currently such a systematic part of our practice routines in music.

Mental imagery is *structured daydreaming*: it involves creating or recreating an experience in your mind's eye, incorporating a variety of senses in the absence of external stimuli.[29] Imagery is seeing,

[29] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 16.

feeling, and sensing without actually doing. It is important to remember that imagery should involve all the senses—as a *polysensory experience*.

For imagery to be effective, images must be vividly pictured (*vividness* is enhanced when emotions are added) and systematic (not just a sequence of random images). One has to have total control over the images; for example, one should have the ability to slow down, speed up, and imagine all the details of the images. It is extremely effective to include images that control both process (the actually "doing") and outcome (the final product of what is hoped will occur). *Coping imagery*—picturing an undesirable situation and then imagining a good way of recovering quickly from this imagined setback or failure—can also be very helpful.

Another important feature to consider when practicing imagery is the direction of the *camera*: do you see yourself as you are watching yourself on video or do you see yourself behind your eyes, as you were in your own body? This is the difference between internal and external imagery, and both can enhance performance. Students should practice both internal and external imagery to discover which works best for them. Perhaps both do.

Coaches' Guide: Sport Psychology Mental Training Manual from the US Olympic Committee sport psychology staff offers some advice for incorporating imagery into practice sessions. It stresses the fact that imagery is a skill, and the best way to develop it is to correctly practice it every day just as a performer would practice a physical skill. The manual suggests relaxation exercises before practice, such as deep breathing or visualizing a pleasant, relaxing scene, engaging in the present, and letting go of negative thoughts; then, visualize being ready and excited for practice and review the goals of the day. During practice, one can visualize how to execute difficult technical elements but also replay successful executions of movements to reinforce the feeling, identify negative thoughts, and imagine letting go of them as a way of practicing overcoming performance errors. After practice, they recommend thinking of the highlights of the day's practice and for students to always leave practice with a sense of accomplishment and technically correct images.

In the same way, one can use imagery during performances by creating the right mindset, managing energy, and seeing oneself facing obstacles or rehearsing on stage. During a performance, imagery can be used to calm down, regain emotional control, reestablish or maintain the original mindset, or create a preview of a successful execution for an upcoming difficult passage. After a performance, an analysis is necessary to reinforce success and learn from disappointment.

Being able to *exert control over our images* is extremely helpful to avoid the effects of uncontrolled negative imagery. Far too many times, we leave things to chance that can actually be controlled by our minds, such as how we feel before a concert or how to get back on track after we make a mistake during a performance. Practicing mental imagery increases control, which in turn increases self-confidence. Mental imagery is an extraordinarily useful tool to add to our daily practice.

Objectives

After completing Unit 4, students will be able to:

1. Understand the concept of mental imagery.
2. Control the different variables of mental imagery.
3. Introduce mental imagery routines into daily practice, for both retrieval of information and performance rehearsal.
4. Experience growth in self-control due to adding more tools to the rehearsal process.
5. Notice an increase in self-awareness, motivation, trust, confidence, and mental toughness.

Key Concepts

Mental imagery

Structured daydreaming

Polysensory experience

Coping imagery

Vividness

Main Points for Lecture

I. Mental imagery.

- Imagery is structured daydreaming.
- Imagery requires intentionality and practice.
- Guided imagery is teaching the mind to engage in a certain set of behaviors or reach a certain goal.
- Imagery resembles perceptual experience but occurs in the absence of the appropriate external stimuli.
- Imagery should become a habit because it can assist students to:[30]
    - Improve practice effectiveness and refine physical skills
    - Correct mistakes
    - Enhance decision-making skills and cope with adversity
    - Practice and enhance psychological skills
    - Nurture confidence
    - Sharpen concentration
    - Manage emotions
    - Prepare for performances and competitions.
- Elements of proper imagery include:
    - Vividness—the images should be as clear as possible
    - Emotional states—for imagery to be effective it should incorporate emotional responses
    - Control—have control over the images; how slow, how fast, how precise, from which angle
- How to best begin practicing mental imagery:
    - A relaxed body and a relaxed state of mind
    - A warm, dark, quiet room

[30] Ibid., 16.

- Centered breathing
- Being specific in uses of imagery
- Practicing imagery in different places and positions

II. Incorporating imagery into practice.

- Create personal scripts consisting of words, symbols, pictures, or video recordings.
- Before practice, get into the right mindset.
- During practice, let go of negative thoughts or mistakes and refocus on productive thinking and improved performance.
- After practice, use imagery to help capture practice highlights to increase confidence.

III. Incorporating imagery into performance.

- Imagining yourself in a performance situation:[31]
  - Approach a place where you have recently performed or have vivid memories of a performance; allow yourself to experience the sensations and note some typical emotions that you experience before performing.
  - Imagine yourself at varying times before performance; list the things you would typically do before performing.
  - Imagine yourself performing, doing what you would typically do with your typical emotional and physical reactions; what do you feel/do/think/see at the beginning and throughout the performance?
  - Write down your responses in a journal to improve self-awareness about your own performances. This will help you practice imagery more efficiently as well as change things that are currently not working for you.

[31] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 19.

IV. Discussion and idea brainstorming session.

- What works for you?
- What does not?
- What do you find easy or hard about mental imagery?
- What do you think will help you become more proficient at mental imagery?

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. 21's exercise.[32] In this exercise, students are encouraged to practice something with one physical attempt (a tricky shift or a passage that one wants to improve musically, for example), a brief pause for reflection, and seven mental attempts after that. This process is repeated three times with one last physical attempt. The process encourages thinking and reflection, and it's a good way to introduce mental imagery in practice.

2. Hear yourself be awesome.[33] Listening to a recording of a piece with headphones, students are encouraged to imagine themselves performing effortlessly.

3. Emotional control imagery script.[34] By imagining yourself in a pressure situation, allowing yourself to experience the emotions and thoughts that arise and regaining control over them, you are practicing helping yourself in pressure situations and finding the right state of mind to perform at your best.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. Using imagery, try to recreate in your mind one of your best-ever performances. Try to experience as many senses in your image as you can. After imagining the performance, assess your ability to use your different senses in imagery. Could you see, hear, smell, even taste what was going on? Did you feel

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[32] Kageyama, "Beyond Practicing."
[33] Ibid.
[34] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 27.

the emotions of the moment again? You can improve your imagery with practice, so don't worry if it's not perfect![35]

2. The energy room. Imagine walking down a dark tunnel that leads to a room that is comfortable and pleasing (you can create whatever type of room you wish.) The room is sealed, but special air is piped into the room that creates the type of energy that you need for a performance or event. You feel yourself become more energized and relaxed, and you feel increasing focus, energy, and relaxation. The breathing continues until you feel appropriately energized and are ready to walk through the tunnel again, feeling *relaxed, focused, intense, centered,* or *confident*. The main objective of this exercise is to have you create an imaginary place to which you can go to create optimal energy and use any mental strategies you want to employ.[36]

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[35] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 179.
[36] Ibid., 192.

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Unit 5 (Weeks 8–9): Energy Management

Figure 5: Miró, Joan. *Figure, Dog, Birds*, 1946.

Topic Overview

Energy refers to our physical and mental readiness, our capacity for doing work. We experience our energy as different types of feeling states: pleasant or unpleasant, low or high intensity. The purpose of this unit is for students to gain a deeper understanding of energy—both physical and mental—and to make them aware of their optimal energy levels in both practice and performance. Students should be able to clearly distinguish between their physical and mental energies. They should be aware of their most optimal level of energy for practice and performance, what affects their energy levels, and what they can

do to regain control if their energy level starts falling out of their optimal zone of functioning, both in practice and performance.

When we think of energy, we tend to think of what happens below our heads. But our energy is both *physical* (what fuels our bodies) and *mental* (what fuels our brains). Furthermore, research shows a relationship between an individual's mental and physical energy levels and their performance. The Inverted-U model created by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson explains this relationship between arousal and performance. According to the model, peak performance is achieved when an individual experiences the right amount of pressure. If the energy and pressure experienced is too low, performance might be too flat, and if the energy and pressure is too high, performance might also decline. Psychologist Yuri Hanin took this research further by developing the Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning model, which states that *each athlete possesses an optimal zone or range of anxiety for peak motor performance.*[37] What this means is that there is an optimal level of peak performance *for each individual*, differing from person to person. An individual's necessary energy for practice might also be different than the amount of energy needed for performance. This is why it is important for students to get to know themselves well and to spend time thinking about their own energy levels—what works for them and what does not. They need to learn to manage their energy and spend time in their optimal energy zones. A student with low energy, for example, may need to learn how to get more energized for performance, whereas a student with high energy levels might need to learn to relax and calm down before every performance session.

While a poor diet, not exercising, or not getting enough sleep drains our physical energy levels, negative or unproductive thoughts and emotions affect our mental energy resources. Emotions are reactions to a stimulus or event. *The emotion paradigm*[38] is a good tool for understanding how emotions are generated: emotions and feelings have an antecedent (cognitive appraisals or goal/motivation

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[37] Huber, *Applying Educational Psychology*, 303.
[38] Ibid., 296.

appraisals) and consequences (the physiological and psychological outcomes produced by the generated emotions). Because thoughts initiate emotions, and emotions can lift or sink our mental energy—especially when performing under pressure—it is extremely important for students to manage their thoughts and beliefs and learn how they talk to themselves in a positive and purposeful manner. The following units—Cognitive Restructuring and Self-Talk—explain more in depth how to do this and offer tools and exercises for improving these skills.

In *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, a book designed for coaches to assist athletes with sport psychology, author Robin S. Vealey states:

> We play sport because we love it, because it is part of our identity, and because we value the goals inherent in competition. However, these reasons that we play make us vulnerable to negative emotions and thoughts, because we want to do well. Since competition involves the public pursuit of highly valued, personal goals and intense public comparison with others, it can create crushing pressure and intense anxiety.[39]

This public pursuit of highly valued goals is also relevant for the world of classical music. In such a competitive field in which one gives so much of oneself, and the competition is fierce (oftentimes against friends and colleagues), one has to be able to manage one's energy—physical and mental—day in and day out. Teachers must be willing to know themselves very well and learn to manage their own energy states to provide a good model to follow, as well as observe their behavioral tendencies under stress and how they react to surprises and change.

Objectives

After completing Unit 5, students will be able to:

1. Recognize that energy management is a skill that can be mastered over time with well-directed effort and practice.
2. Understand how much of their thinking is under their control and how thinking influences energy management.

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[39] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 268.

3. Increase their self-awareness and reflect on their energy attitudes and preferences for practice and performance.
4. Control their energy resources better in different situations.
5. Experience feelings of self-efficacy and self-control from knowing themselves better and being able to manage their energy more efficiently.

Key Concepts

Physical and mental energy

Inverted-U model

Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning

Emotion paradigm

Main Points for Lecture

I. Energy management.

- What is energy and why does it matter?
    - Energy is our capacity for vigorous action; we have stores of energy but we need to learn to use them wisely.
    - Energy management matters because it is critical for practicing well and acing performances.
- Different levels of arousal:
    - Under arousal: if your energy level is too low, you might not have the needed intensity to perform.
    - Optimum arousal: this allows you to stay relaxed enough to perform despite pressure.
    - Over arousal: a high energy level can make you too wired or nervous to perform.
- Understanding stress:
    - Sources of stress include environment, body, and thoughts.

- Fight-or-flight response is a natural bodily response to stress that leads to staying and fighting or fleeing.

- Coping with stress: stress is impossible to eliminate, but you can learn to manage it.
  - Journaling or keeping an emotion log—exploring the emotions, thoughts, and feelings surrounding your life helps you gain self-knowledge and self-regulation.
  - Physical activity—the benefits of physical exercise on both body and mind have long been established.
  - Breathing exercises[40]—for example, during a 10-minute abdominal breathing exercise that should be performed without interruptions, you will practice breathing using your entire lung capacity, which serves as a natural method of relaxation.
  - Mindfulness meditation—sitting comfortably, focusing on your breathing, and bringing your mind to the present.[41]
  - Cognitive restructuring—challenging and altering negative thoughts.
  - Thought stopping—interrupt and remove problematic thought patterns.
  - Self-talk—test, challenge, and change your self-talk for positive reinforcement.
  - Mental reversals—athletes or performers interpret their feeling states as positive or negative depending on their "motivational moods;"[42] an athlete in a goal-oriented mood would try to avoid high intensities of arousal, which are interpreted as anxiety. But this anxiety could be reframed as excitement by reversing the motivational mood from goal-oriented to playful by using a cue that shifts focus away from outcome pressure and toward enjoyment and passion.
  - Other relaxation exercises—practice yoga or try relaxation apps such as Mindbody, 10% Happier, Sleepcycle, Pzizz, Calm, or Headspace.

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[40] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 54.
[41] Siegel, "Mindfulness Solution."
[42] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 292.

II. Finding your optimal level of energy.

- Creating personal charts: what depletes your energy? What enhances it? How are your energy levels during practice and performance?
- Recall past outstanding performances. What were your thoughts, emotions, energy level?
- Techniques to lower or raise energy levels:[43]
    - Too energized—check your breathing, take "abdominal breaths," listen to calm music, monitor consumption of caffeine/sugar, may feel the need to yawn, use energy for light physical activity, remove yourself from high-energy people, remove yourself from chaotic surroundings.
    - Too flat—check your breathing, listen to faster or more intense music, have caffeine, get a bit more physically active, move toward high-energy people, move toward busier surroundings.

III. Effective responses for controlling negative mental energy under pressure.

- Preparing effective responses to all types of situations and emotions that may occur during performance involves creating scripts to plan how you are going to talk to yourself and react to different events, situations, people, or mistakes.
- Think about and plan for negative feeling states during pressure situations so that you will be able to regain control when you need it most.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Gaining control of your energy level. Do you have a sure-fire way to get relaxed in just a few seconds? What about if you need to be psyched up?[44] Develop your optimal energy profile[45] by brainstorming to come up with personal ways to get relaxed or excited on command.[46]

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[43] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 53.
[44] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 36.
[45] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 386–389.
[46] University of California San Diego Health, "20 Min Body Scan3."

2. Assessing energy levels in practice.[47] Following a specific practice session, use a series of questions about energy to guide students to self-reflect on what worked (and what didn't) during that particular session, helping them identify strategies for controlling energy.

3. Assessing energy levels in performance.[48] As in the prior exercise, questions guide students through self-reflection on what worked and what did not work during a performance to help them find ways to correct mistakes during their next performance or repeat successful behaviors.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1.What affects your energy level? List three things that drain and three things that charge your emotional battery during practice and performance. How much control do you have over these charges and drains? Take charge of your environment.[49]

2. Find the correct energy level. To find your ideal level of energy, think of your three best and three worst performances. Try to remember how your body felt before and during those performances. Do you remember times when your energy was too high? Too low? Just right? How does your body feel when your energy level is just right?[50] Try and recall what you were thinking and doing before these performances.

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[47] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 51.
[48] Ibid., 52.
[49] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 34.
[50] Ibid., 35.

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Unit 6 (Weeks 10–11): Cognitive Restructuring

Figure 6: Pollock, Jackson. *Convergence*, 1952.

Topic Overview

Cognitive restructuring, also known as cognitive reframing, is a technique drawn from cognitive therapy that can help people identify, challenge, and alter stress-inducing thought patterns and beliefs. An important coping skill, cognitive restructuring is the process of refuting cognitive distortions and faulty thinking that generate dysfunctional emotions and replacing them with rational emotions.[51]

The purpose of this unit is to provide students with insight and tools to better understand and manage their own beliefs and negative thoughts, as well as cope with any destructive responses and patterns they might have. It is important, albeit perhaps sometimes uncomfortable, for students and teachers alike to realize that much of what we think or do not think about is within our control. But thinking well or productively is a skill that must be trained over time. As preparation for the following unit—Self-Talk—students need to be aware of their own thoughts first and be able to identify those that are hurting them, if they recognize any. The exercises highlighted in this and the following unit emphasize *self-monitoring*—the capacity to observe, measure, and evaluate one's own experience. It is through this process that students will be able to recognize if they have any maladaptive thinking or unproductive self-talk and be able to change their reactions and behaviors.

The most important terms to consider in this unit are core beliefs and negative automatic thoughts. A *core belief* is the very essence of how we see the world and ourselves: beliefs are the bottom line of our minds. When a situation occurs and we react negatively towards it, we might *hear* negative thoughts or self-talk, but a core belief is most likely behind the reaction. This is why it is important to understand and get to know our beliefs and underlying self-statements—they strongly affect our reactions and behavior. Students should identify their beliefs, learn to explore the advantages and disadvantages of a given belief, formulate a more functional belief, and use belief modification techniques to implement it. Changing beliefs is not simple and requires time, effort, and persistence.

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[51] Huber, *Applying Educational Psychology*, 330.

On the other hand, automatic or routine thoughts are those that are instantaneous. Although it is easy to say that we should not believe everything we think, it can be hard sometimes to separate what is useful from what is not. Situations of extreme pressure, especially, can make our minds go wild. Recurrent *negative thoughts* left unchecked can cause emotional reactions harmful to our practice and performances. With patience and work, students can also learn to identify negative thoughts, challenge them, and replace them with ones that are more balanced.

Teachers must recognize unhealthy patterns of thought in their students and understand how properly to help them with their own particular difficulties. The reality of the constant pressure and competitiveness inherent to the classical music world makes it even more important for students and teachers to be able to know themselves. With a deeper understanding of their own story, thoughts, wishes and desires, it will be easier for students to control their thoughts, properly regulate their emotions, and, therefore, take control of their mental energy.

Objectives

After completing Unit 6, students will be able to:

1. Identify negative or dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs that might be affecting practice sessions and performances.
2. Learn and apply techniques to stop unproductive thoughts and modify beliefs.
3. Experience growth in self-control resulting from choosing how to think well.
4. Experience a decrease in dysphoric thinking during practice sessions or before and during performances.
5. Learn techniques to treat themselves with self-compassion, resulting in a better relationship with themselves and others.

Key Concepts

Cognitive restructuring

Self-monitoring

Core beliefs

Negative automatic thoughts

Main Points for Lecture

I. What are emotions?

- An emotion is a reaction to some real or imagined antecedent stimulus that results in physiological, experiential, and behavioral changes in an individual.[52]
- Keep an emotion diary to develop emotion regulation. Make a log with six categories:
    - Date and time
    - Your mood change
    - External: who was there, what was going on, where the mood change took place, other unusual circumstances
    - Internal thoughts: what your thoughts, fantasies, and memories were at the time
    - What you think a well-adjusted person would feel under the same circumstances
    - Mood/feeling agreement: assign a rating of 1 to 10, describing how well your mood corresponded to feelings you picture a well-adjusted person having under the circumstances
- Keeping an emotion log will help students identify their core beliefs and automatic thoughts.

II. Understanding core beliefs and automatic thoughts.

- Core beliefs are central beliefs people hold about the self, others, and the world.
- Automatic thoughts are images or mental activities that occur in response to a trigger, like an action or event.
    - Negative automatic thoughts may be distorted, accurate but you draw distorted conclusions, or accurate but dysfunctional.

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[52] Ibid., 296.

- Thoughts that cause distress include all-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing, disqualifying or discounting the positive, emotional reasoning, labeling, mental filtering, mind reading, overgeneralization, "should" statements, selective interpretations, personalization, emotional reasoning, and over-responsibility.

- The cognitive model suggests perceptions or thoughts about a situation influence emotional and behavioral reactions.
- We become trapped in thought through "either-or," "what-if," "have-to," and "if-only" thinking.

III. Strategies to identify and modify a belief.

- Identify the belief: are there patterns or similar themes in your thoughts?
- Challenge the belief: ask yourself what experiences you have that show this belief is not completely true all the time. Make a list of the experiences and be as specific as possible.
- Try a behavioral experiment: Write down a belief you want to test, think of a few tasks you could do to test the core belief, write down what you would expect to happen if your belief were true, carry out the tasks, and record what actually happened. Then compare your predictions with the actual results and write down what you have learned from the experiment. Write down a new balanced belief that fits with your conclusion.
- Follow through: keep reminding yourself of all the evidence against the unhelpful core belief.

IV. Strategies to identify and modify negative automatic thoughts.

- Decide whether to focus on an automatic thought and challenge it:
  - Explore how typical the automatic thought is.
  - Identify other automatic thoughts and images in the same situation.
  - Do problem-solving about the situation associated with the automatic thought: What is the evidence for this thought? Is there an alternative explanation? What is the effect of believing my automatic thought? What could be the effect of changing my thinking?
  - Explain the belief underlying the automatic thought.

- If I look at the situation positively, how is it different? Will this matter five years from now?

- Modifying automatic thoughts:
  - To modify thoughts that are hurting us, we need to consciously create an alternative response.
  - To begin changing your thoughts, create a journal log with four categories: event, thought, consequence, alternate response.

V. Self-compassion techniques.

- Consider how you would treat somebody else.
- Carefully watch your self-talk.
- Comfort yourself with a physical gesture.
- Memorize self-compassionate phrases to tell yourself, such as, "May I be kind to myself in this moment?"

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Strategies to modify old beliefs.[53] Many different strategies can modify an old belief, such as Socratic questioning, identifying all-or-nothing errors in thinking, rational-emotional role-play, and using other people as a reference point in belief modification.

2. Identifying automatic thoughts.[54] Through several questions that students can ask themselves when they notice a shift or intensification of affect, automatic thoughts can be uncovered, and with time, so can core beliefs.

3. Deciding whether to focus on an automatic thought.[55] A series of questions guide the student toward making a decision on either entertaining or dismissing an automatic recurring thought.

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[53] Beck, *Cognitive Therapy*, 151–165.
[54] Ibid., 81–93.
[55] Ibid., 105–106.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. When you notice your mood changing or getting worse over the next week, stop and ask yourself, What's going through my mind right now? Write down a few of these thoughts on a piece of paper. Sometimes you may not be able to tell what you were thinking—in that case, replay the scene as vividly as you can in your imagination, as if it's happening again, and concentrate on how you're feeling. Then ask yourself, What's going through my mind? Clearly understand the difference between what you are thinking and what you are feeling emotionally.

2. Distinguish emotions by listing specific situations where you felt any of the following emotions and write them down: sad, down, lonely, unhappy, anxious, worried, fearful, scared, tense, angry, mad, irritated, annoyed, ashamed, embarrassed, humiliated, disappointed, jealous, envious, guilty, hurt, suspicious. This will help you be more aware of what's bothering you in the future.

Suggested Reading

Beck, Judith S. *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1995.

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Kennerley, Helen. *Overcoming Anxiety: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques*. New York: University Press, 1997.

McCullough, Christopher J., and Robert Woods Mann. *Managing Your Anxiety: Regaining Control When You Feel Stressed, Helpless, and Alone*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Suinn, Richard M. *Anxiety Management Training: A Behavior Therapy*. New York: Plenum Press, 1990.

Unit 7 (Weeks 12–13): Self-Talk

Figure 7: Basquiat, Jean-Michel. *Self-Portrait*, 1982.

Topic Overview

Throughout the previous unit on cognitive restructuring, a foundation was created to encourage students to pay attention to how they think, especially if how they think is strongly affecting, negatively, their mood and daily life. Although how we think and how we talk to ourselves are certainly connected, the skills have been separated into two units for the purposes of this curriculum. The goal of this unit is to help students stabilize and balance what they say to themselves inside and outside of practice and, especially, what they say to themselves prior to and during performances, auditions, and important events. Students need to realize that not only can they change those thoughts that hurt them, they can also learn how to talk to themselves in better and more productive ways so their practice and performances feel

more within their control. They can either leave self-talk to chance, or they can prepare and learn how to talk to themselves. After all, they would never leave technical preparation to chance for a performance.

Self-talk is the voice in our heads that only we can hear. *Positive* self-talk, which seeks to bring the positive out of the negative, enhances performance; *negative* self-talk impairs performance.[56] Mastering the control of positive and negative self-talk is a skill that requires self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-discipline.

Three types of self-talk that positively affect emotions include task-specific statements relating to technique, words of encouragement and effort, and mood words. Self-talk is more effective when the words are simple to utter, logically associated with the actual performance, and appropriate or connected to the sequential timing of the performance.[57] Self-talk *errors* include leaving the present, using too much language, beating oneself up, giving up on oneself, and focusing on problems instead of solutions. Teachers should be able to recognize these patterns of thinking in themselves and others so that they can stop negative and harmful trains of thought and empower students to be the best versions of themselves they can possibly be.

Several strategies teachers can use to enhance student self-talk skills, according to the *Coaches' Guide: Sport Psychology Mental Training Manual*[58], include asking directly what students are saying to themselves when they are practicing, performing something specific, or responding to a correction, providing scripts or language routines that focus on behavior, thoughts, physical feel, images, or emotions, and working individually to provide personal cue words for key techniques.

Most importantly, for students to manage and positively improve their self-talk, they need to be aware of it. It is vital for them to understand the difference between critical and negative language and perform

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[56] Huber, *Applying Educational Psychology*, 36.
[57] Ibid., 37.
[58] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 39.

exercises like completing a self-talk worksheet[59] after practices and performances—this will make them more aware, over time, of their thinking tendencies, weaknesses, and strengths.

Objectives

After completing Unit 7, students will be able to:

1. Recognize the difference between productive and unproductive self-talk.
2. Grow a solution-focused mindset, a mindset that does not entertain negativity but always looks for solutions.
3. Adopt techniques to improve positive and productive self-talk in practice and performance.
4. Experience more control and self-efficacy in practice and performance through the use of positive self-talk.
5. Practice self-compassion and develop a more balanced view of reality, experiencing more fulfilling relationships as a result.

Key Concepts

Self-talk

Positive self-talk

Self-talk errors

Main Points for Lecture

I. What is self-talk?

- Self-talk includes all purposeful and random thoughts that run through your mind, all things you say to yourself both silently and out loud.
- Language controls our behavior—you are what you say to yourself most of the time.
- When left untrained or unchecked, self-talk often becomes negative, pessimistic, and critical.

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[59] Ibid., 39.

- Leaving self-talk to chance makes performers inconsistent.

II. Three ways to enhance self-talk during lessons and practice.

- Ask your students what they are saying to themselves.
- Provide your students with scripts or language routines that focus on behavior, thoughts, physical feel, general ideas, or images and emotions.
- Work with your students to develop personal cue words for key techniques.

III. Common self-talk errors and examples.[60]

- Focusing on weaknesses during performances—performances or competitions are the times when you should tell yourself about your strengths and have positive, informative thoughts.
- Focusing only on outcome—when you compete or perform, what you do control is *your* performance.
- Focusing on uncontrollable factors—keep your thoughts on factors that are within your control.
- Demanding perfection from oneself—striving for perfection is okay, demanding perfection is not.

IV. Changing negative self-talk.[61]

- To becoming aware of your self-talk, take a step back to focus on what you are saying to yourself; identify negative thoughts, and identify the situations in which they typically occur.
- Park or stop your negative self-talk and replace it with positive, task-focused thoughts. Visualize a big stop sign. Replace the negative with positive—for each negative thought, give yourself five positive ones.
- Identify in advance what you want to say to yourself in a specific situation and then use it automatically to replace those negative thoughts.
- Practice thought-stopping and replace the negative talk. It's important to stay attuned to your internal talk. With enough practice, positive self-talk will become second nature.
    - Situation—describe a situation in which you tend to talk to yourself negatively.

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[60] Ibid., 26.
[61] Ibid.

- Negative statement—identify the negative statement you say to yourself.
- Stopping the negative thought—identify words or thoughts you could use to stop the negative thought.
- Positive replacement—list positive, beneficial statements you can use to replace the negative, harmful thoughts; these should be meaningful to you.
- Practice.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Performance preparation. Make a chart with two columns, *situation* and *ideal self-talk*, to prepare what to say to yourself at these times: one hour before performance, five minutes before performance, and critical moments during performance.

2. Cultivate an internal locus of evaluation.[62] Relying *only* on others to set your value will undermine your confidence. Although external feedback is good and necessary for learning, you need to develop an internal locus of evaluation: make your own decisions about what you believe in and think is important, and create your own criteria for excellence. What do you believe in? What does excellence mean to you?

3. Self-talk worksheet for practice: What were you thinking today?[63] Use this worksheet after a practice session to self-reflect on your thinking during practice. How do you generally think when you practice? Is your language positive or negative? During your practice today, what were you thinking? What were you thinking before, during, and after practice? Was today typical of the way you think in serious practice? How does your thinking during practice differ from your thinking in performance? What strategies do you have to make your thinking as helpful as possible? What did you say to yourself that you could have perhaps said differently in a more directive and positive manner?

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[62] Kageyama, "Beyond Practicing."
[63] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 39.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. Write a two- to three-page paper describing a situation in your life (a period of time, a performance, etc.) in which you feel that how you talked to yourself prior to that affected the situation negatively. Then, describe a situation in which you felt the opposite. Compare them. Why do you think you talked badly to yourself in the first situation? Did you feel like you had a choice? In retrospect, is there something you could have said to yourself differently? How do you think that would have affected the outcome of the situation? How about the moments (weeks, days, hours) leading to the event? How would they have felt different if the way you had talked to yourself had been different?

2. Complete the Self-Talk Worksheet[64] after your practice sessions for seven consecutive days. Write a one-page paper reflection on your experience after reading back the sheets. Was it helpful? If so, why? Did you notice how your self-talk affected your practice? How? Explain.

Suggested Reading

Grand, David, and Alan Goldberg. *This is Your Brain on Sports: Beating Blocks, Slumps and Performance Anxiety for Good!* Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2011.

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Tod, David. *Sport Psychology: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

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[64] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 39.

United States Olympic Committee, Performance Services Division. *Coaches' Guide: Sport Psychology Mental Training Manual*. Colorado Springs, CO: 2006.

Vealey, Robin S. "P3 Thinking." In *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 201–224. West Virginia: Fitness Information Technology, 2005.

Unit 8 (Week 14): Goal Setting

Figure 8: Myron of Elentherai. *The Discobolos*, circa 450 BC.

Topic Overview

Goal setting consists of organizing and regulating our lives each day in a disciplined and committed manner to actively pursue and accomplish our goals and dreams. According to goal theorists Locke and Latham, goals affect our behavior by directing our attention to relevant things, increasing the effort we expend, increasing our persistence over time and in the face of obstacles, and motivating strategy

development. Goals initiate actions in us that lead to goal attainment.[65] Effective goal setting helps direct behavior and is inherently motivating; it focuses on concrete and specific actions, it's flexible, and it's optimally realistic.[66] Effective goal setting includes strategies for achievement and regular revisiting and rewards. Ultimately, setting goals changes behavior.

Two types of goals include *outcome* goals, which are based on uncontrollable results or outcomes, and *performance* goals, which are based on performance accomplishments that are usually self-referenced.[67] A good formula to remember when setting effective goals is the acronym, SMAART: set goals that are Specific (easily quantifiable), Measurable (not abstract), Aggressive yet Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Since the more specific the goal, the more assessable, we should always be thinking of strategies to specify the goal: how many, how often, under what conditions, what action. Goals should make you push your limits, but they should be realistic. They should be personally relevant to each individual and they should have a specific target date, since goals that are open-ended with no time frame for achievement do not facilitate focused behavior.[68] While deadlines create a sense of urgency that is necessary for accomplishing goals, we should be careful not to set goals that are too difficult and unchangeable, too vague and not measurable enough, or out of the individual's control.[69]

Setting big goals is relatively easy, but what can be hard for students is setting those small process goals that eventually lead to the big ones. To improve goal-setting behavior, it needs to become a habit: it is extremely important for students to adopt goal setting in their practice sessions and performances, and throughout their career. Practice goals are crucial for *deliberate practice* (effective and *relevant* practice, as described in Unit 3), which is the kind of practice that we aspire to achieve daily. Through goal setting, students make their practice effective and not mindless. Setting several SMAART goals for each practice session will help students direct their thoughts and effort. This is also true for performances and

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[65] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 151.
[66] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 4.
[67] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 153.
[68] Ibid., 157.
[69] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 4.

competitions: students should set several SMAART goals for their performances so that they'll be less nervous, less focused on the outcome, and more in control of their movements and thoughts.

It is difficult for everybody to move from an outcome goal to distinctive and organized process goals. For this reason, this unit offers several exercises to help students identify their outcome goals in practice and performance as well as their long-term outcome goals and to start practicing the art of being able to break them down into specific actions and behaviors.

Objectives

After completing Unit 8, students will be able to:

1. Use process goals in practice and performance.
2. Recognize and articulate short-term and long-term career goals.
3. Learn how to use goal setting for long-term motivation.
4. Experience self-control growth and increasing persistence over time in the face of obstacles.
5. Grow their work ethic and responsibility, which will improve the quality of their professional relationships.

Key Concepts

Goal setting

Outcome goals

Performance goals

SMAART goals

Deliberate practice

Relevant

Main Points for Lecture

I. What is goal setting?

- Goal setting consists of using goals to change habits and behavior.

- Using goal setting is as necessary as having a coach or a teacher.
    - Provides direction—goals tell you where you need to go and how to get there.
    - Gives feedback—goals tell you when you are making progress.
    - Provides support—goals keep you going when you might otherwise give up.
- Types of goals:
    - Outcome—based on uncontrollable results, but help motivate
    - Process—based on doing the right thing regardless of outcome, helping gain confidence as well as organizing and directing effort
    - Performance—short-term objectives set for specific duties or tasks
- Four steps to goal mapping:
    - Identify your purpose
    - Plan and develop your goal map
    - Act on purpose
    - Focus on the journey
- SMAART goal mapping:
    - Specific
    - Measurable and not abstract, like achieving happiness
    - Aggressive yet achievable
    - Relevant and time-bound

II. Goal setting in practice.

- Areas to set goals in practice:
    - Technical learning and refinement
    - Improving resistance—being able to play an entire piece through, for example
    - Practicing performance
    - Developing quality practice or deliberate practice behaviors

- Dealing with distractions

- How to integrate goal setting into practice:
  - Reserve time at the beginning or end of practice to write goals down.
  - Set specific times in practice to work on goals.
  - As a teacher, remind students of specific occasions where it would be a good time to work on a specific goal.

III. Goal setting in performance.[70]

- Use goal setting to focus attention and reduce distractions.
  - Clearly define what your student's job is in a performance or competition.
  - Do not allow students to focus on outcome, which is out of their control.
- Use goal setting to focus on behaviors and not just intent. Those behaviors should be things your students already know how to do. Doing those things should increase the probability of a successful outcome.

IV. Using goal setting for long-term motivation.

- Goal setting reminds students to work hard and keep their passion and perseverance.
- When setting long-term goals, remind students to be realistic and flexible.
- Students should be encouraged to constantly remind themselves of the ultimate reason they are doing what they are doing.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. The average perfect day. Write down what your average perfect day would look like: What time do you wake up? What do you do once you are awake? Who do you say hello to in the morning? What about after that? Create detailed, step-by-step entries. Remember that this should be an average day, one that

[70] Ibid., 7.

you would want to repeat over and over again. This will give you an idea of what you want to achieve in life and where you want to be.

2. Create a long-term goal map. Make a list of your long-term goals (goal 1, goal 2, goal 3). Then, break down your goals into discrete projects (project 1, project 2, project 3, project 4) and each project into manageable tasks (task 1, task 2, task 3, task 4).

3. Goal setting progression worksheet.[71] Write down your long-term or dream outcome goals and break them down into a list of things that need to happen ("first thing I need to do, second thing I need to do, third thing I need to do"). These to-dos are a progression of things that need to happen before you can reach the goal. For example, your dream outcome goal could be: "I want to do an orchestra audition and win an orchestra job." If so, the first to-do might be to get your music ready and organized. The second might be to start practicing your excerpts and Concerto, and the third to-do is contact teachers to play for in order to get feedback before an audition. For each of those things, break down the task into smaller ones and identify what you have to incorporate into your daily practice in order to reach that goal.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. Describe in your own words why you play your instrument.

2. Develop three examples of SMAART goals for a practice session and explain why they are SMAART.

Suggested Reading

Annarella, Lorie A. "Goal Setting: An Important Part of Teaching." *Educational Horizons* 79, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 89–91.

Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.* NY: Scribner, 2016.

Ericsson, Anders. *The Road to Excellence: The Acquisition of Expert Performance in the Arts and Sciences, Sports, and Games*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996.

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[71] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 11–12.

Ericsson, Anders, and Robert Pool. *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*. NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

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United States Olympic Committee, Performance Services Division. "Goal setting." In *Coaches' Guide: Sport Psychology Mental Training Manual*, 3–12. Colorado Springs, CO: 2006.

Vealey, Robin S. "Goal Mapping." In *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 149–175. West Virginia: Fitness Information Technology, 2005.

Unit 9 (Week: 15): Confidence

Figure 9: Klimt, Gustav. *The Tree of Life*, 1909.

Topic Overview

Every book on sport psychology includes a chapter on *confidence*—the belief or degree of certainty athletes possess about their ability to be successful in their sport.[72] To understand confidence, we must first be able to distinguish the concepts of *self-confidence*, *self-esteem*, and *self-efficacy*; these terms are dissimilar but often get thrown together:

- Self-confidence is a belief or trust in one's abilities.
- Self-esteem is an evaluation of one's self-worth.
- Self-efficacy is an individual's subjective judgment about their ability to execute a context-specific task, given the skills and knowledge possessed.[73]

In musical performance, self-efficacy refers to a musician's belief about his or her ability to successfully execute the actions necessary to produce a desired musical outcome.[74] What this suggests, then, is that self-efficacy is tied to technical skill. Following that line of thought, it should be true that developing technically perfect students would automatically be enough for these students to become confident. After all, higher levels of confidence are related to focusing on sources or strategies that students personally control, such as mastery of physical skills and preparation.[75] But is that actually enough? The answer is no—training strong technical students does not necessarily equal training confident students. Why not?

Self-confidence is an ever-changing state that does not rely entirely on *perfect* technique or performance. It is a complex mixture of beliefs, everyday decisions to take the right actions, self-regulation, perspective, and specific attributions about personal mistakes, failures, and successes. *Attribution theory* suggests that people interpret the causes to the outcomes of their behaviors. We ask ourselves: "Why did I perform so well today? Why did I make those mistakes?" How individuals answer

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[72] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 300.
[73] Bandura, *Self-Efficacy*, 191–215.
[74] Martin, "Self-Efficacy Beliefs," 3.
[75] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 311.

these questions influences their future motivation and behavior. Individuals can make three attributions about an outcome:

- *Stability*. Is the situation stable (the situation will always be the same) or unstable (the situation can change, get better)?
- *Locus of causality*. What is the cause of the outcome—internal (me) or external (something I have no control over)?
- *Locus of control*. Is the situation my responsibility and in my control or not my responsibility and in someone else's control?

Confidence is daily work. It is about making daily decisions on how to think and interpret one's own experience. Students that choose to view outcomes as their responsibility and are willing to exert greater personal effort will be more confident as a result.

Because self-confidence is the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy, it needs to be addressed as an important skill for students to practice, no matter how uncomfortable it might feel to discuss.

In *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, Robin S. Vealey describes nine sources of confidence for athletes:[76]

1. Achievement or self-efficacy: based on improving skills, achieving goals, or demonstrating ability
2. Preparation: good practice strategies and knowing you are prepared for a situation
3. Self-regulation: developing and using skills and strategies to maintain focus and manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that lead to optimal performance
4. Models: seeing oneself and others perform successfully
5. Feedback and encouragement: receiving useful feedback and encouragement from others, such as teachers, friends, or family
6. Teacher leadership: believing that your teacher is skilled
7. Environmental comfort: feeling comfortable in a competitive environment
8. Physical representation: feeling good about your physical self

[76] Ibid., 307.

9. Situational favorableness: feeling that the momentum of a situation is in your favor

Students should clearly understand what is confidence, why it is important, how it develops, and what strategies to utilize to strengthen it. They should be encouraged to focus on outcomes within their control through the proper use of mental imagery, goal setting, energy management, cognitive restructuring, and self-talk, and to develop an internal locus of motivation. Finally, it should be the goal of every teacher to reflect on how they affect the confidence of their students through their perception of their students' abilities and how they correct mistakes, explain success and failure, and encourage proper execution.[77]

Objectives

After completing Unit 9, students will be able to:

1. Understand what real confidence is and make an effort to work on it daily.
2. Develop an internal locus of motivation and control and individually define success.
3. Reframe the way they react to failure and mistakes: there are only results and our thoughts about them.
4. Experience growth in positive feelings, hope, and motivation.
5. Improve the quality of their relationships with others as a result of having better relationships with themselves.

Key Concepts

Self-confidence

Self-efficacy

Self-esteem

Attribution theory

Stability

Locus of causality

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[77] United States Olympic Committee, *Coaches' Guide*, 79.

Locus of control

Main Points for Lecture

I. Understanding real confidence, what it is and what it is not.

- Self-confidence is the belief in your own ability to succeed. Therefore, confidence is a choice, and it is a choice we make every day.
- Confidence is not something you get; it is something you earn through hard work, preparation, and incorporating good mental skills into practice and performance.
- It is not as simple as saying that people who have high self-confidence do not ever doubt themselves or their ability; they simply know how to work through self-doubt and answer self-doubt.
- Confidence is not:
    - Bragging or talking loudly
    - Something that comes *only* from winning; although motivation can come from both wanting to win and wanting to excel in performance or mastery, confidence does not rely only on outcome.
- Self-confidence means believing in your ability to perform well despite negative thoughts or doubts.

II. Why is self-confidence important?[78]

- When we feel confident, we perform the way we want to perform.
- When we feel confident, we focus on the task at hand and spend more time thinking about what is important.
- When we feel confident, we free up, try harder, and take more risks.
- When we feel confident, we view failure as a lack of effort on our part and something we can change, which means that we try even harder when we do not reach our goals.
- When we feel confident, we use better strategies; we play to win instead of not to lose.
- When we feel confident, we rebound from adversity.

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[78] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 50.

III. How does confidence develop?

- We develop confidence through:
  - Previously experienced success in practice and performance or competitions (but we need to enlarge the definition of success)
  - Optimal preparation through hard or smart practice
  - Seeing oneself and others perform successfully
  - Accurately interpreting and managing the body's energy levels
- What do we need to be confident about?
  - We can physically execute the skills needed to perform successfully.
  - The mental skills needed to maintain focus and make effective decisions can help us succeed in our careers.
  - Our resilience can help us bounce back from poor performances and overcome setbacks and obstacles.

IV. Strategies for improving self-confidence[79]*—we are in charge of our confidence*

- Believe in the method. Build success into your practice by using SMAART goal setting and setting measurable, challenging yet achievable goals to prove your ability.
- Trust, rather than doubt, your preparation, ability, and strategy.
- Act confidently. Present a confident front during performances and competitions: head up, shoulders back, and facial muscles loose.
- Think confidently. Believe that you can and will achieve your goals, discard negative thoughts, and use positive and productive self-talk.

[79] Ibid., 53.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Personal highlight reel.[80] In this three-step visualization exercise, think about your most memorable and inspired performance experiences. From those performances, select 5- to 15-second snippets to compose a 60-second highlight reel. Then take all the positive feelings, sounds, and sensations from those snippets and project them onto imagining your next audition or performance (again, for 60 seconds). See yourself finishing the performance ecstatic, not just relieved. In the final 60-second segment, project your positive experience onto more low-key performances and day-to-day rehearsals.

2. Identity statement exercise.[81] Name a strength you currently have or are working to develop, and create a statement with it. Then, brainstorm an aspiration and create another statement with that. Put the two statements together and make it a daily habit to repeat your statement several times every day. This is an exercise to mold your self-image.

3. Positivity challenge.[82] Can you avoid complaining for a week? Find a positivity partner to keep you in line. Keep a score of the times you may find yourself complaining, whining, or dwelling on something negative. Try replacing negative thoughts with thoughts of gratitude and appreciation.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. Create a brag book.[83] Think back and list your 10 proudest and most personally meaningful accomplishments. For each, write down what you did, what happened (the situation and how things played out), and how you felt. These don't have to be big moments; "ah-ha" moments in lessons or regular days are also valid. Write a short self-reflection after you are done with the list. Do you observe any recurrent behaviors that helped you accomplish all of those things?

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[80] Kageyama, "Beyond Practicing."
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

2. Strength-awareness exercise.[84] Make a list of several aspects of your field that you are good at when you are at your best: technical, musical, artistic, and mental. Make another list with several aspects outside of your field that you are good at when you are at your best: physical (eating, sleeping, recovery, general fitness, self-care), emotional (mood), intellectual, and interpersonal (key relationships, social support).

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[84] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 86.

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Unit 10 (Week 16): Sticking With It in the Long Run—*Putting It All Together*

Figure 10: Banksy. *What We Do in Life Echoes in Eternity* (mural in Queens, New York), 2013.

Topic Overview

The final unit of this curriculum is a concept in its own right and, at the same time, a synthesis of all preceding units in this curriculum. Like practice, *sticking with it* is a process, and the purpose of this unit is to remind students of the importance of sticking to their mental training—because doing that, creatively and consistently, will help them stick with their craft and continually improve.

Imagine a courageous juggler playing with several balls. Sometimes he holds two or three of the balls in one hand but keeps juggling the rest of the balls with the other; sometimes he manages to keep all of the balls in the air with both hands. His goal is to keep juggling all the balls for as long as he can. *Sticking with it* for musicians is much like juggling. In the long run, and to keep going on with our lives, we are constantly juggling all of these skills and concepts. Maybe we briefly drop one ball while we focus on

others, but then we pick it up again, as the ultimate goal is to be using all of them consistently for as long as we can.

To juggle all these balls consistently for so long, we need to combine all the skills. First, we need an attitude of *hopefulness* versus *hopelessness*. Hopelessness is a state of despair, a feeling of abandonment of oneself to fate, giving up without trying. Hopefulness, on the other hand, is a specific attitude towards failure: it entails thinking of failure as something transient. In other words, hopefulness is an attitude of taking responsibility and choosing optimism, hard work, and setting challenging but attainable goals for ourselves. Hopefulness is connected to *resilience*—the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties—and *grit*—staying in love with our craft for as long as we do it, having the passion and perseverance we need to sustain long-term motivation and attain long-term goals.

To juggle consistently, we also need to utilize all of the concepts and mental skills we have studied in this curriculum. We need a growth mindset, a belief in the fact that we can cultivate our qualities with time and effort throughout the process. We need to exercise awareness, use our concentration and focus, and maintain good preparation and deliberate practice. Mental imagery helps us practice and visualize success. Energy management allows us to be in charge of our body's and mind's precious energy resources. Cognitive restructuring assists identifying, challenging, and reframing any negative beliefs and thoughts that might be unproductively interrupting our juggling. Through self-talk we talk to ourselves in an encouraging and positive way. Goal setting guides us in structuring the daily challenges that keep us moving forward. And practicing self-confidence, a positive attitude and belief in ourselves, will drive us towards action and will help us get back on our feet after we make mistakes or experience setbacks. All of these skills combined also will help us achieve flow more regularly, the mental state in which we are fully immersed in the activity that we are doing in the moment.

We have to keep in mind that certain challenges will arise in this juggling adventure of ours. Some of the challenges familiar to both students and teachers are burnout, dealing with injuries, slumps, or

declines in performance, inconsistency, perfectionism, and commitment.[85] Out of all of those threats, *burnout* seems to be the most common and dangerous—because it develops over a long period of time, making it hard to recognize and even harder to recover from. Burnout is a multidimensional syndrome characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.[86] Because emotions can have deleterious consequences, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, students should learn how to control them to maintain good mental health. Burnout, in particular, is an intrapersonal consequence of chronic negative thoughts and emotions that can degrade practice and performance. According to American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger, burnout presents three types of symptoms: biological and physical, behavioral and emotional, and cognitive, social, and performance deficits. Kallus and Kellman also explain burnout with the following formula:

prolonged stress + insufficient recovery + deficient coping = burnout.[87]

Some coping strategies for burnout include *stress management strategies*, getting more rest, shortening practice times, taking a break once in a while, finding ways to have more fun in practice, putting your craft in perspective, talking with others, changing routines, and learning additional coping strategies.[88] Other *preemptive strategies* include proper practice, periodic time-out, positive reinforcement from teachers, anxiety management, and mental practice such as relaxation, concentration, imagery, and self-talk.[89] These are the strategies that should be discussed and addressed in class, as it is always better and simpler to prevent burnout than to cope with it.

It is important to remember, as we finish this curriculum, that *often the hardest part of learning a new skill is putting in the time to develop it*.[90] This is true for both mental and physical skills. Particularly throughout this curriculum, students might feel that not only is it hard to commit the time to perfect a new

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[85] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 336–355.
[86] Maslach and Jackson, "Measurement of Experienced Burnout," 99–113.
[87] Huber, *Applying Educational Psychology*, 329.
[88] Ibid, 329.
[89] Ibid, 327.
[90] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 73.

mental skill, it can also feel very draining when they already have plenty of physical skills and repertoire to practice. More often than not, mental skills are dismissed for that reason: it feels like too much effort with no immediate results. Teachers should convince students to correctly and regularly practice their mental skills until they become a habit, just like they would practice a technical skill. Enhanced mental skills will allow students to avoid burnout and enjoy the learning and performing processes. Students should come up with their own ideas on how to achieve that consistency by engaging in self-reflection and the personal practice of different exercises.

Properly and consistently practicing all the mental skills outlined in this curriculum will provide students and teachers alike with an edge for finding creative solutions to the problems that arise throughout students' academic and professional careers. The truth is that life is an unpredictable and challenging but rewarding journey.

Let's get to work and enjoy the beautiful, unexpected ride.

Objectives

After completing Unit 10, students will be able to:

1. Connect all the skills outlined in the curriculum.
2. Recognize and label different emotion-related performance issues.
3. Use different strategies to *prevent* emotion-related performance issues.
4. Use different strategies to *cope with* emotion-related performance issues.
5. Develop personal ways to commit to the development of their mental training progress.

Key Concepts

Hopefulness

Hopelessness

Resilience

Grit

Burnout

Stress management strategies

Preemptive strategies

Main Points for Lecture

I. Common challenges.

- Burnout is a state of fatigue and frustration that presents several characteristics:[91]
  - Mental and physical exhaustion
  - Stemming from exhaustion, negative thoughts and feelings as well as negative changes in responses to others such as cynicism, lack of empathy, or feeling alienated from others
  - Perceived lack of accomplishment, which decreases performance levels and feelings of self-esteem
  - Disillusionment or lack of motivation with one's involvement in the profession
- Why does burnout happen? Why are some people more susceptible to burnout than others?
  - Everything begins with the demands of practice and performance or competition.
  - Burnout does not happen overnight.
  - Some things that can lead to burnout are over-practicing or failing to adapt to stress.
  - Some personalities are more susceptible to burnout as they have a stronger response to stress.
  - Some students feel trapped, like they have to continue doing what they are doing. This is different from passionate commitment.
  - Negative perfectionism can arise from unrealistic expectations for flawless performances.
  - Narrow self-concept can arise because personal identity is completely wrapped in the profession.
- Consistency is challenging because it requires consistent thoughts, focus, feelings, and behavior.

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[91] Vealey, *Coaching for the Inner Edge*, 336–337.

- Perfectionism can be a double-edged sword because we must accept that one cannot and does not always perform perfectly.
- Commitment:
    - Commitment is purposeful, efficient, and persistent; it involves will and a strong and fixed purpose.
    - Ask students to write their specific definition of commitment.

II. Sticking to mental training: start small, stay simple, and follow through.[92]

- Teachers should develop their own teaching philosophy and strategize how the inner game fits into it. Brainstorm what you can use as a teacher to increase your commitment to maintaining such a program.
- Principles of effective practice include correct practice and regular practice:
    - How much should students practice their mental game? Start with 15 to 20 minutes per day.
    - When should students practice their mental game? Try at the beginning or at the end of the day and schedule mental training at the same time every day. Another possibility is to schedule it right before or after daily physical practice.
    - Start small: focus, at first, on one skill at a time.
- Follow through: remind students to keep practicing their mental skills over time.

Exercises / In-Class Activities

1. Daily logbook[93] *and weekly logbook.*[94] The daily logbook is a chart to complete before and after a practice session; it asks the student to list physical and mental practice goals and to evaluate their practice session when it's over, including daily accomplishments and things to keep working on. The weekly logbook helps students figure out the week's mission and goals and the strategies for attaining those

[92] Ibid., 173.
[93] United States Olympic Committee, *Athlete Mental Training*, 80.
[94] Ibid., 81.

goals; it also helps brainstorming predicting obstacles that might get in the way and providing space for self-evaluation at the end of the week.

2. Mental training journal. Get a notebook that can be used as a personal mental training journal. Use it to log goals, record exercises and study strategies.

3. Stick with it. List three ways that you think would help you stick with it and accomplish your mental training goals.

Essay / Discussion Questions

1. Write down a list of five unhealthy behaviors that you catch yourself being guilty of when you start experiencing stress or feeling overwhelmed. Then write down five different things/behaviors/actions you could do instead that might be more productive behaviors. Write a short reflection about what you could do to implement more healthy coping behaviors to deal with stress.

2. Try to *put it all together* yourself. In your own words, write about how all of the concepts and skills that we have worked on throughout the curriculum will help you commit to and improve your craft in the long run. Make this reflection personal, and clearly specify how each concept or skill will help you.

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